Talking with Vice Adm. Albert H. Konetzni, Jr., USN Deputy and Chief of Staff U.S. Atlantic Fleet

"When President Theodore Roosevelt announced that the nation would 'Speak softly and carry a big stick,' the big stick he was referring to was the United States Navy ..."

Edited from remarks given by Vice Adm. Konetzni at the USNI Warfare Exposition and Symposium, Oct. 2, 2002.

It is a great pleasure to be with you to discuss the state of the U.S. Navy ... I had the great pleasure of welcoming the USS Monitor's turret home to Hampton Roads a few weeks ago. It was an impressive occasion. I think Monitor's story has great lessons for Americans.

In many ways USS Monitor symbolizes both the best and worst about America. In my view, America's greatest quality is our innovative spirit. Our freedom, ideas and actions have produced the world's greatest inventions and subsequently the greatest economy. At the same time, Americans have short memories. We, too quickly forget the sacrifices that have been made by so many to make this nation what it is today.

USS Monitor was clearly the most innovative ship of her day — an iron ship,172-feet long with a 41-feet, 6-inch beam and two 12-inch guns housed in a revolving turret. There are many first's associated with the USS Monitor, she was the first ship to have a revolving turret, she was the first ship where the officers and crew had to live entirely below the waterline, she was the first ship credited with having below waterline flushing toilets. [But] most important was the crew. The crew — like all of our Sailors today — were strictly volunteers.

Those young people valiantly fought the USS Virginia to a draw and ended Virginia's unchallenged assault on the U.S. Fleet. But what too many people forget is that those men went down in a storm because Monitor wasn't really ready for action. Our greatest weakness is that [our] memories are too short. USS Monitor was an innovative ship, but we could have done better.

The fact is that the Monitor's pumps were inadequate to keep her from sinking during stormy weather in December 1862. The USS Monitor's construction had been rushed because the U.S. Navy was too slow to embrace ironclads. In the end, Monitor sunk not from enemy fire, but from faulty systems and design. That is the message I want to bring to you today. We have a great country, capable of awesome Naval innovation. We have great young men and women, who will carry the day when the nation calls. If we ignore history we will allow our readiness to slip and our force structure to dwindle. Our young people are the ones who will suffer the consequences.

Innovation, especially in America, is truly accelerating. Think of how the cellular telephone and personal computer have changed our lives. Technologies like the Global Positioning System and unmanned systems are changing the way we live and fight. I am convinced that these are just the tips of the technological iceberg of change. The question is: How do we capture these innovations and use them correctly to ensure that we are ready for the challenges ahead? In my view, great innovations will only be successful if they are formed by knowledge of history. We have not always applied American ingenuity soon enough to make a difference.

History is full of examples of [America] not being ready for the worst: World War II — after a devastating blow at Pearl Harbor, we sent our submarines to the fight with torpedoes that didn't work; in Korea — our soldiers froze because they didn't have warm clothing and we didn't have the bridge forging machines that we needed. In Vietnam — we didn't build the national and military resolve necessary to win.

Unfortunately, the war on terrorism in some ways is no different. I could go on all day about the [problems] of the nineties ... as a result, our Navy had some real problems at the start of the war [on terrorism]. We didn't have enough bombs to get the job done and were forced to borrow thousands from the U.S. Air Force. Years of neglect on maintaining the Fleet showed, as we had to pump millions of dollars into the USS John F. Kennedy to get her underway. The size of our Fleet is dwindling toward 300 ships or lower — yet we don't have the resources to build ships while at the same time maintain the ones we have.

Our nation's foreign policy with regard to terrorism was also rather naive. In hindsight, it is clear that our response to terrorism pre-9-11 was inadequate. If we had taken the time to understand history and our cultural differences with other people, we may have seen the signs of 9-11 on the horizon. Whether it was Lebanon, Khobar Towers, our embassies in Africa, or the USS Cole, our responses were piecemeal and ineffective ...

History has told us that wars always result from miscalculation. We left the impression in the minds of the terrorists that we were weak and unwilling to risk going after them. We left the widespread idea that America would only lob a few rockets and then go home. How wrong they were ...

...I don't want you to get the impression that I am negative — quite the opposite. We are making real progress in this war. The Taliban that supported al Qaeda is no longer in power in Afghanistan. Almost 2,000 terrorists and their supporters have been captured. President Bush is serious when he says that "We will not stop until we get them all." Naval Forces are the

difference-makers in this new war: ♦In the last year, six CVBGs (Carrier Battle Groups) and seven ARGs (Amphibious Ready Groups) have sustained our Seals and Marines over 600 miles inland. ♦The USS Kitty Hawk (CV-63) deployed immediately to serve as a forward operating base for our special forces. ♦Carrier Aircraft have struck over 2,000 targets on missions that have sometimes lasted over 12 hours. ♦Our ships have launched over 100 tomahawk missiles. ♦We have conducted over 200 boardings in support of operations aimed at capturing fleeing terrorists.

We are winning the war on terrorism mainly because of our wonderful people in the military. It comes as no surprise to me that our young people have performed so brilliantly. There has been a lot of talk about this generation or that generation, but let there be no doubt — this current generation is up to the challenge. I have vivid memories of meeting with a young Seal at the Portsmouth Naval Hospital. I can't tell you his name, but his nickname is Turbo. Turbo went to some hellish places to take on al Qaeda. He gave his left leg for his country and some of his buddies gave their lives. You can be proud of your Navy's performance during this war on terrorism. The simple fact is that we could not have executed the campaign in Afghanistan without our nation's aircraft carriers and all the ships — and all the young people that support them. At the same time, however, we all know that the nation is not building enough ships and submarines to accomplish all we are being asked to do today and in the future. We need 8 to 10 [new ships] per year to sustain current force structure; we will build 5 in FY02.

Our efforts in Afghanistan have proven the U.S. Navy is truly the key to success in 21st century warfare where we often will not have forward bases from which to operate. Our dilemma is that given our current resources, we can't maintain a forward fleet, fight the war, maintain our ships at the right level of readiness, and build enough ships to have a future fleet that is adequate. First, we need to be more efficient — then we must argue for an appropriate bottom line. The nation needs to know the consequences for not maintaining and building an adequately sized fleet. So now, the problem that we as a nation face: Which vital missions do we ignore? Which ships do we allow to rust at the pier? Which world crisis do we neglect in order to respond to some other crisis, somewhere else? We need to make the intellectual argument for fully funded depot level maintenance, and building the right number of ships and aircraft. In the end, the Congress and the public need to understand that maintaining the most capable Navy in the world is expensive. But it is still the best security investment for their dollar.

I need your help in keeping the Navy at the forefront of the public's mind. I ask you to read, speak, think and write about our Navy's future. Start a debate. Try and answer some questions like: Do we need more ships, aircraft and submarines? If so, why? For what missions? What should the future Fleet look like? Do we have ship maintenance right or is more needed? Are we on the right course with regard to attrition, retention and leadership? How can we meet the threats of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction? Is Asia going to explode? How can we ensure it doesn't? In the end, it's your Navy and decisions made without a healthy debate are always flawed. ▭

Mine Warfare ...

Edited from a brief given by Vice Adm. Konetzni, Jr., Deputy and Chief of Staff, U.S. Atlantic Fleet at the USNI Warfare Exposition and Symposium. Vice Adm. Konetzni invited the press to a dialogue on mine warfare to fully understand the scope of Naval requirements. Thanks to Rear Adm. Paul Ryan, Commander MINEWARCOM and Lt. j.g. Herlina Rojas, MINEWARCOM Public Affairs Officer, for their expert insight and comments regarding this article.

Sea mines have been an historically important factor in naval warfare. Mines have caused major damage to naval ships, slowed or stopped commercial shipping, and forced the alteration of strategic and tactical plans. Fourteen U.S. Navy ships have been sunk or damaged by mines since World War II (see Figure 1), over three times the number damaged by air and missile attack. Today, advancing technology heightens the threat posed by mines, making them more difficult to detect, classify and neutralize. These experiences, plus the ready availability to potential adversaries of inexpensive sea mines (see Figure 2) have increased interest in mine warfare within the U.S. Navy. In 1995, the Chief of Naval Operations directed that mine warfare receive greater emphasis and become an integral capability of battle forces rather than remain the sole province of a dedicated force.

Mine warfare (MIW) is comprised of both mining operations and mine countermeasures, and may be either offensive or defensive in nature. Mine countermeasures (MCM) incorporate much more than actual mine detection and neutralization. Key elements of MCM include: intelligence; reconnaissance and warning; development and exploitation of environmental databases; reduction of ships' magnetic and acoustic signatures; and specialized training in mine warfare tactics.

Successful integration of MIW capability into battle group units requires its promotion as a major warfare area, similar to the traditional air, surface and submarine specialties. Each of these warfare specialties has a "sponsor," specific to the platform type, within the OPNAV requirements division (N7). In contrast, MIW, in which effective execution requires use of platforms from various warfare specialties, has a capabilities-based sponsor, Expeditionary Warfare (N75). Public law [10 USC 505] mandates this sponsorship. Careful consideration should be given to the appropriate sponsorship for Mine Warfare so that the benefits of capabilities-based sponsorship can be maintained while advancing the emphasis on Mine Warfare as a vital warfare competency.

The development of MIW capability within the battle force is known as "mainstreaming." Mainstreaming of MIW can and should be happening today, independent of the introduction of organic mine warfare capabilities into the battle force. Fielding a MCM capability organic to battle force units provides increased impetus to development of MIW expertise. At the same time, mainstreaming provides the professional foundation on which effective utilization of future organic assets will be built. However, mainstreaming, with its emphasis on development of capabilities within the battle force, may lead to the misconception that new organic mine countermeasures systems (OMCM) are replacements for existing dedicated platforms. This is not the case.